

FINAL

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

1. Name

historic Independence Historic District

and/or common West Franklin Street/Wabash Avenue Historic District

2. Location

Wabash Avenue between Iowa and Illinois Streets, and West
street & number Franklin between Wabash and St. Joseph Avenues ☐ not for publication

city, town Evansville ☐ vicinity of congressional district Eighth

state Indiana code 018 county Vanderburgh code 163

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Library

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple ownership

street & number

city, town ☐ vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Vanderburgh County Recorder

street & number City-County Administration Building

city, town Evansville state Indiana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Indiana Historic Sites and Structure has this property been determined eligible? ☒ yes ☐ no
Inventory

date 1978-1979 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Indiana Department of Natural Resources

city, town Indianapolis state Indiana

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The West Franklin Street/Wabash Avenue Historic District is a fully developed area of both commercial and residential use. It lies on flat land approximately a quarter mile north of the Ohio River, and a comparable distance west of Pigeon Creek. (See topographical map.)

Both West Franklin Street and Wabash Avenue were laid out as exceptionally wide thoroughfares. Wabash Avenue today is a broad residential boulevard with median strip plantings. West Franklin is a major traffic artery and serves as the "Main Street" of the city's West Side commercial district. Other streets in the historic district are narrower and primarily residential in character. (See Map A.)

The combination of commercial and residential uses coupled with a long period of development have resulted in a wide variety of building types, materials, and styles. The commercial buildings along West Franklin Street are represented by two major types: 1) two story frame structures with gables or parapets oriented toward the street, and 2) two to three story buildings of brick and cast iron (See Photo 1). Both types have glass "storefront" first floors. Some commercial buildings still retain original fixed canopies or roll awnings. Styles range from Italianate, through Romanesque Revival (see Photo 2) and Beaux Arts, to Chicago School.

The residences in the district cover a broad range of types and styles. Most homes along Wabash Avenue are of a relatively large scale, ranging from two to two and a half stories. Including both brick and frame construction, they date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (See Photo 3). Houses along Illinois and Michigan Streets, while of approximately the same vintage, are generally of frame construction and of a smaller scale (see Photo 4). Queen Anne, Stick Style, and Bungalow are the predominant residential architectural styles within the district.

Also within the district are two major historic institutions--a public library and a church complex. The large Romanesque Revival church (1882; rebuilt after fire, 1902) is accompanied by a 1923 Collegiate Gothic school, Georgian Revival Convent, and Eastlake rectory. (See Photos 5 and 6.) The West Branch Carnegie Library, surrounded by a public park, was constructed in 1912 in the Beaux Arts style. (See Photo 7).

Originally platted as part of Lamasco City in 1837, streets in the district were laid in a standard north-south/east-west grid with Franklin Street and Wabash Avenue planned as major thoroughfares, 120 feet in width. Wabash Avenue today is a boulevard with plantings in the center strip. (See Photo 8.) West Franklin Street once had a street railroad running down its center but today has four lanes of traffic and two of parking. Landscaping on a broadened center strip has occurred as part of a Federal undertaking. (See Street Sections A and B.)

The block occupied by the Carnegie Library serves as a public park. Mature deciduous trees are throughout the square. (See Photo 9.) Other "open spaces" within the district are primarily parking lots, including the block occupied by the St. Boniface Church complex. (See Photo 10.)

The commercial district is fairly dense, although spot demolition, parking lots

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

This district clearly represents the development of a late-19th century satellite community. The growth of the city of Lamasco west of Pigeon Creek was in answer to the barriers presented by geography and by the economic market west of Evansville. The trade which occurred between West Franklin merchants and the agricultural community of western Vanderburgh and Posey counties accounted for the wide variety of businesses and institutions within the district. The decision of the more prosperous merchants to build their homes near their stores on North Wabash was a common practice. The styles and building methods also evident within the district plainly depict important 19th century national trends.

The West Franklin Street/Wabash Avenue Historic District is significant both for its architecture and its compact summarization of a satellite community of the late nineteenth century. The businesses, houses, and institutions of the Town of Independence are clearly contained in this intact eight block core. The district's immediate environment has undergone considerable clearance or alteration, making the boundaries exceedingly clear-cut.

The district was located in the western half of what was once known as Lamasco City, a community that was contemporary with and adjacent to the early city of Evansville. Populated largely by Germans, Lamasco was originally platted in 1837 and encompassed an area just north of Evansville on both sides of Pigeon Creek, a tributary of the Ohio River a half-mile south. The area east of the creek was annexed to the City of Evansville in 1857, but the western half of Lamasco maintained its identity as the Town of Independence until 1870 when it, too, was annexed.

The natural barrier formed by Pigeon Creek no doubt contributed to the independent development of West Side businesses and organizations. Because St. Joseph Avenue formed the city's western boundary until 1890, the business district on West Franklin Street was important in serving the needs of the rural population of Vanderburgh and Posey Counties to the west, as well as those of city residents west of the creek.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were a period of substantial growth for the West Franklin business district and the adjacent residential areas. The street railway provided a boost to business when it was introduced to this part of Evansville near the end of the century. Connecting the West Side with the rest of the city, it was illustrated on an 1899 map as traveling along West Franklin Street and turning south on St. Joseph Avenue.

Building permits from the 1880s and '90s suggested that the merchants and businessmen who established their businesses on West Franklin frequently constructed their homes nearby. Although this period of intense building on the West Side corresponded with growth in other parts of the city, most notably downtown, differences were evident in scale and density. Compared with Main Street downtown, the West Franklin business district had a greater feeling of openness, with lower buildings and wider streets. Houses along Wabash Avenue and Illinois and Michigan Streets, though comparable to houses in the Riverside and Washington Avenue districts near downtown, generally had deeper setbacks and wider

9. Major Bibliographical References

On continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 33

Quadrangle name Evansville South

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

1	6
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4	4	7	8	0	0
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4	2	0	3	9	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

1	6
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4	4	7	9	1	0
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4	2	0	3	4	6	0
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E

1	6
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4	4	7	2	6	0
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4	2	0	3	6	3	0
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G

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B

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4	4	7	9	1	0
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4	2	0	3	9	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

D

1	6
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4	4	7	5	5	0
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4	2	0	3	4	7	0
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F

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4	4	7	2	6	0
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4	2	0	3	6	9	0
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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

On continuation sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Douglas L. Stern and Nancy Long

organization Department of Metropolitan Development date 15 April 1980

street & number 301 Old Courthouse telephone 812/426-5487

city or town Evansville state Indiana

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 8-18-80

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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and new construction have created a few gaps. (See Photos 11, 12, and 13.) The residential area along Wabash Avenue, though largely intact, is typified by fairly low density, with large houses and generous yards. (See Photos 14 and 15.) The more modest houses on Michigan and Illinois Streets are closely spaced with less side yard and streetside setback. (See Photo 16.)

The natural barrier formed by Pigeon Creek to the east was in great measure responsible for the development of the West Franklin Street/Wabash Avenue area as a community independent of Evansville. The district experienced its greatest period of growth beginning in the 1880s and continued to expand and change in character into the early part of the twentieth century. Most of the older buildings standing today date from the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Beginning in the early 1890s, a street railway (now gone) ran down the center of West Franklin and turned south on St. Joseph Avenue. The railway linked Evansville and the West Side and encouraged the growth of this satellite business district. The commercial section was characterized by two story frame stores with gables or parapets facing the street, and two or three story brick commercial buildings. The first floor storefronts usually consisted of display windows flanking a recessed entrance. Fixed canopies of wrought iron often extended over the sidewalks. (See Photo 17.)

Most of the prominent late nineteenth-century West Side merchants built stately homes nearby the West Franklin corridor, particularly along Wabash Avenue. Employees built less pretentiously on side streets. Old photographs indicated that the streets, though graded, were unpaved. An 1880 map showed that a hose house stood on the northeast corner of the park to serve the burgeoning community. (See Map B.) The fire station was replaced by an enlarged facility three blocks away on St. Joseph Avenue near West Franklin Street shortly before the Carnegie Library was constructed in the park in 1912.

The West Franklin Street/Wabash Avenue Historic District includes both commercial and residential areas. Most buildings within the business district along West Franklin are commercial structures of two or three stories. Houses along Wabash Avenue were originally built as large single family homes, but some have been sub-divided into apartments. Houses on other residential streets are generally smaller in scale and still single-family. The district also includes a church, rectory, convent and school, and a public library and park.

Houses and commercial buildings within the district are generally in good condition and retain their integrity. Although many alterations have occurred, most are reversible. The most common alteration to residential structures, besides their division into apartments, has been the application of aluminum siding. (See Photos 18 and 19.) Also, some have front porches or additions that date from some time after the original construction, particularly the 1930s and 1940s. (See Photo 20.)

Changes to commercial buildings have also included the application of aluminum siding to frame structures, but most alterations have been to the first floor facades. Awnings and canopies have been removed, and storefronts "modernized" by the application of colored panels, brick or permastone and the replacement of original windows and doors by the extruded aluminum type. A few buildings are in need of better maintenance. (See Photo 21.)

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A recently completed plan for the revitalization of the West Franklin commercial area makes recommendations for restoring many buildings to their original appearance, and movements toward an organized revitalization effort have begun. There are approximately 50 residential structures within the district, and 60 commercial or public buildings.

The residential areas of the district are largely undisturbed by intrusions, except for a mock-Historical funeral home at 21 West Illinois and a few parking lots. The West Franklin Street commercial area is less fortunate. (See Photo 22.) Although in use they conform to the street's commercial nature, most of the intrusions are infill buildings that do not conform in period or scale to the buildings around them. Almost all are single story buildings dating from the 1940s or later, such as Postal Film and Cathedral Glass at 2033-2035 West Franklin. Permanent Federal Savings, at 2131 West Franklin, another intrusion, is an older building that has been substantially altered. A few parking lots also appear along West Franklin. (See Photos 23, 24 and 25.)

West Franklin Street between Wabash and St. Joseph Avenue is a cohesive, high density commercial district. Franklin Street east of the district is commercial in nature, but the density is lower, its buildings are newer, and cohesiveness is lost. As one enters from the east, the beginning of the district is marked by plantings on the Wabash Avenue boulevard and the library park on the south. Two story commercial buildings face the library on the north, an introduction to what will be found farther down the street. Succeeding blocks are characterized by two or three story commercial structures spaced closely together on both sides of the broad street. Canopies or awnings on several buildings form a unifying element. The district ends as Franklin Street narrows at St. Joseph Avenue, and the street takes on a more residential quality.

A list of significant pivotal buildings within the district follows:

- *West Branch Carnegie Library, 2000 West Franklin: This Beaux Arts library of brick and stone was constructed in 1912. Designed by local architect Clifford Shopbell and Company, it occupies the center of a public park. (See Photo 7.)
- *Laval Block, 2013-2023 West Franklin: A two story brick commercial building, the Italianate Laval Block was constructed in the late nineteenth century, and was recently renovated on the exterior. (See Photo 26.)
- *Heldt-Voelker Hardware Store, 2100 West Franklin: Originally the Rosenberger Store, this 1890 building is the gem of the West Franklin Business District, and indeed is the best remaining example of cast-iron architecture in the city. In almost pristine condition, the three story brick store has preserved not only its cast iron and pressed metal facade, but also its sidewalk canopy and many interior features. (See Photos 17 and 27.)

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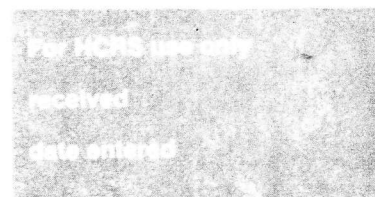
- *First Federal Savings, 2200 West Franklin: Originally the West Side Bank, this two story limestone building has undergone some changes, but still retains its original Beaux Arts flavor. (See Photo 29.)
- *Gerke Building, 2303 West Franklin: The Gerke Building is one of two outstanding cast-iron facades in the district. Although the ground floor has been altered, the Classical Revival building is well-maintained. (See Photo 30.)
- *August Rosenberger House, 409 North Wabash: The Rosenberger residence, a 2½ story brick house with a pepper-pot domed tower, is probably the most elaborate of the houses on Wabash Avenue. Constructed in 1894, its window lintels and decorative brick panels resemble those on the Rosenberger (Heldt and Voelker) store. (See Photos 3 and 20.)
- *St. Boniface Church, 418 North Wabash: This 1882 brick Romanesque Revival church was rebuilt in 1902 after a fire. Its twin spires can be seen from a great distance, making it a highly visible West Side landmark. A rectory and convent are located on the church grounds, as well as a Collegiate Gothic school. (See Photos 1 and 5.)
- *House, 2109 West Illinois: This house is typical of the more modest homes in the district. A two story frame house, public records indicate that it was built in 1891 by Sebastian Rollet, a fireman. Although the front porch is a later addition, the side porch is probably original to the house. (See Photo 31.)
- *House, 2128 West Illinois: An 1887 building permit suggests that this house was constructed that year by J. Henry Kriepke, Jr., a miller. A one and a half story frame cottage with Stick Style ornamentation, it has a later projecting Italianate bay on the front.

Intrusions to the District are indicated on the map. Following is a list of contributing properties along West Franklin Street.

Boundaries in the residential portions of the district were determined on the basis of scale and integrity. Tenth Avenue between Iowa and Virginia Streets is characterized by smaller residences than on Wabash Avenue, that have lost integrity due to the application of aluminum siding, removal of porches, etc.

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Buildings situated on West Franklin Street within the West Franklin Street-Wabash Avenue Historic District which are Contributing Resources (i.e., 50 years or older). See attached map.

North Side

+ WABASH AVENUE

2013 The Apple Core

2015 Cole's Shoppe of Hair Fashion

2017 F-Stop Fitzgerald's, Inc.

2019 Bertha Becker Insurance Cos.

2021 H & R Block

2023 AA Hobby Shop

2037 Hagedorn

+ 10th AVENUE

2017 Paul's Pharmacy

2121 Old National Bank

2123 Moutoux Furniture & Appliance Co.

2127 Ben Franklin Store

+ 11th AVENUE

2201 Koressel Paper & Paints

2203 Rajo Corp.

2207 Haymakers Association

2211 Malcolm Branson, M.D.

2229 Risley TV Sales

+ 12th AVENUE

2301 Reitz Rexall Drugs

2303 Helfrich Realty Co.

2305 Vacant

2315 Tri State Trophy

2319 J B Cyclery

(2335) Part of Weinbach West

+ ST. JOSEPH AVENUE

South Side

+ WABASH AVENUE

2000 West Branch Library

+ 10th AVENUE

2100 Heldt & Voelker Co.

2110 Unique Cleaners

2114 Uptown Shoe Outlet

2116 Vacant

2126 West Side Pet Clinic

+ 11th AVENUE

2200 First Federal Savings & Loan

2218 Weber Equipment Co.

+ 12th AVENUE

(1981 City Directory Listings)

JCM July 1981

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Beginning at the northeast corner of the intersection of West Franklin Street and St. Joseph Avenue; then proceeding north along the eastern right-of-way line of St. Joseph Avenue to its intersection with the alley between and parallel to West Franklin Street and West Michigan Street; then proceeding east along the southern right-of-way line of the alleyway to its intersection with North Tenth Avenue; then proceeding north along the eastern right-of-way line of North Tenth Avenue to its intersection with West Virginia Street; then proceeding east along the southern right-of-way line of West Virginia Street to its intersection with an alley which runs west of and directly behind properties facing North Wabash Avenue; then proceeding north along the eastern right-of-way line of the alleyway to its intersection with West Iowa Street; then proceeding east along the southern right-of-way line of West Iowa Street to its intersection with an alley which runs between and parallel to Wabash Avenue and Casselberry Avenue; then proceeding south along the western right-of-way line of the alleyway across Virginia and Michigan Streets to its intersection with an alley running between and parallel to Michigan Street and West Franklin Street; then proceeding west along the northern right-of-way line of the alleyway to its intersection with North Wabash Avenue; then proceeding south along the western right-of-way line of North Wabash Avenue to its intersection with West Illinois Street; then proceeding west along the northern right-of-way line of West Illinois Street to the eastern line of Lot 7 of Block 96 of Lamasco; then proceeding south along the lot line to its intersection with an alley which runs between and parallel to Illinois Street and Indiana Street; then proceeding west along the northern right-of-way line of the alleyway to its intersection with North Eleventh Avenue; then proceeding north along the eastern right-of-way line of North Eleventh Avenue to its intersection with an alley running between and parallel to Illinois Street and Franklin Street; then proceeding west along the northern right-of-way line of the alleyway to its intersection with North Twelfth Avenue; then proceeding north along the eastern right-of-way line of North Twelfth Avenue to its intersection with West Franklin Street; then proceeding west along the northern right-of-way line of West Franklin Street to its intersection with St. Joseph Avenue at the place of beginning.